

15.—NOTE ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE
PINK-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*PUFFINUS C. CARNEIPES*
GOULD) ON THE COAST OF CEYLON.

On June 26th this year one of us (Y.B.) picked up a dead Shearwater on the beach a quarter of a mile north of Mount Lavinia. It came ashore just at high tide and when found must just have reached shore, as the crows, large numbers of which frequent this beach in the monsoon, had not attacked it. It was brought home and submitted to careful investigation and identified as a Pink-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus c. carneipes* Gould). It had been dead at least 24 hours, probably longer. The plumage, however, though sodden, was complete but in moult and the coloration of the naked parts still recognizable. In the circumstances, it was decided to preserve the specimen complete rather than attempt to prepare a made-up skin. This was accordingly done in 10 per cent formalin in alcohol, after opening one eyeball to ascertain the colour of the iris, as this could not be determined on superficial examination.

The Pink-footed Shearwater has only been recorded once previously from waters around Ceylon. This was the specimen mentioned by Wait (1931) as having been picked up at Panadura, 17 miles south of Colombo in 1879, and which was identified at the British Museum. Identification of our present record has been assisted by consulting Wait and Alexander (1928) and we have no doubt of its correctness in view of the measurements and other characteristics detailed below.

Following is a brief account of the specimen:—

Measurements	Sex
	Male in non-breeding state
Total length.....	17.2"
Wing length.....	12"
Tail length.....	4.7"
Tip of beak to angle of gape.....	2.2"
Tarsus.....	2"
Middle toe.....	2.4"
(without claw)	

Plumage—

General colour sooty all over, feathers being blackish distally, but white near their shafts. There is little or no grey tinge ventrally, but there are some paler feathers on the throat.

Naked parts—

- (a) *Bill*: Mainly pale flesh-colour, darker towards the tip. Lower mandible similar, dark grey at tip and along free edge. There is a median dark element dorsally and dark borders to upper mandible as well as dusky edges to nares,
- (b) *Feet*: pink.
- (c) *Iris*: Very dark brown, almost black.

This species appears to reside normally in the seas off Western Australia, but, like other shearwaters with restricted distribution, it occasionally gets carried by marine currents or weather beyond its normal range, and probably is more often carried in the direction of Ceylon than the two specimens so far known would indicate.

References—

Alexander, W. B., 1928, *Birds of the Ocean*.Wait, W. E., 1931, *Birds of Ceylon*, 2nd edition.

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AND

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16.—WILD BIRDS AND THEIR CAPTIVE YOUNG.

Do parent birds poison their captive chicks? Common folk in some parts of Bengal believe that they do. A similar belief seems to prevail in the English countryside as E. D. Cumming suggests in his *Idlings in Arcadia*. He writes (p. 219), 'I once found a young blackbird ready to fly—his nestmates had flown—held fast by a strong thread of grass which by some means had laid firm hold of his foot; luckily for him it was too short to let him climb over the edge of the nest, but he must have starved—some people say been poisoned by the parents—had he not been rescued in time.' Douglas Dewar (*Birds at the Nest*, chap. v) cites many instances of young birds being left to their fate or evicted from the nest by their unfeeling parents. A few cases of young birds being done to death by one of the parents are also quoted by him as evidence of lack of parental affection. But Dewar's culprits all nested in aviaries and their method of infanticide lacked the refinement of practised poisoners. Dewar however illustrates the attitude of wild parents towards caged offspring in chapter vi of the book mentioned above. In the third week of May 1907, he placed three young sparrows in a cage. 'The parents fed all three, both bringing food until June 6th, when the hen ceased to do so apparently having gone to nest again. The cock sparrow continued to feed the young until June 26th.' This is obviously a case of simple desertion, but not of poisoning.

A case that smacks of Borgian methods is therefore well worth recording.

A friend of mine once removed four fledgelings of a Grey-headed Myna (*Sturnia malabarica*) from the nest hole. Not knowing how to feed them, he decided to leave the task to the parents and placed the cage at a place where they could not help noticing it. For the first two weeks things went satisfactorily, but an old peasant who saw the birds feed the captive chicks, shook his head doubtfully. They will poison the young ones, he confidently remarked and before long his prophecy came true. After three weeks or so the old birds began to bring lizards and other vermin, which if they were not actually poisonous were doubtless unwholesome as food and three of the chicks quickly expired. The fourth and last was then let loose but too late to be saved. I do not know whether it was a case of deliberate poisoning. The Grey-headed Myna cannot be expected to reason cogently and plan the death of their young ones to escape the labour of feeding them for an indefinite period. Dewar's sparrows simply shirked their duty and left the chicks. Did the Grey-headed Myna grow more